

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDING OF A TELEPHONE
CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND
CHARLES COLSON ON APRIL 12, 1973, FROM 7:31
TO 7:48 P.M.

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BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND CHARLES COLSON ON APRIL 12, 1973:
FROM 7:31 TO 7:48 P.M.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

COLSON: No I didn't and I got nothing on Watergate
ah Mr. President.

PRESIDENT: Well, basically we have to face the fact
that it's ah very pervasive Washington
story...

COLSON: Uh huh.

PRESIDENT: ...and a media story but it hasn't reached
the country but eventually, of course, if
they keep pounding it will. But ah (laughs)
somebody told me the ninth that Jack Parr
had some kind of a junket you know if it was
a rape or murder. Right here this is just
evesdropping or some damn thing.

COLSON: That's right.

PRESIDENT: And, and really we, you've gotta to keep the
damn thing in perspective, but it's terribly
difficult for people here, everybody's in
battle you know and thinking this is the
only story in town. You get out of town and
find, you find, it isn't the only story.

COLSON: No.

PRESIDENT: And yet it is, it is a terrible story for
those that are in the God damn thing, isn't
that the problem?

COLSON: Yes sir, that's right. That is the problem.

PRESIDENT: You know. Let's face it, it's tough for
Mitchell, it's tough for Magruder, it's
tough, you know.

COLSON: Oh, it's hell, it's hell let's face it.

PRESIDENT: Dean and the rest because those guys, you
know, they know that this ah, madman judge
is (laughs)

COLSON: That's right.

PRESIDENT: Right.

COLSON: If it weren't for that it would be ah, it be a hell of a lot less of a...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: ...a problem but ah, sure and, well and I think it's a terrible diversion from other things, that what bothers me.

PRESIDENT: Oh, that's the point, you know, that here we got, we've, we've done great things, we've got greater things to do and here they're talking about this God damned Watergate.

COLSON: I know, that, that's-

PRESIDENT: That is disgraceful.

COLSON: Well I had ah, I had ah, it, it is and I had a press conference last night before this dinner and I, I talked about all the great accomplishments of this administration. Now when you were up here five years ago at this dinner you, the country was in flames and civil war. The spirit of the country was (unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: Was I there five years ago?

COLSON: Yes sir, five years ago you did the, ah--

PRESIDENT: Ah, where was it, where'd they hold it?

COLSON: At the Statler, and ah you...

PRESIDENT: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

COLSON: ...filled the place and that's when you said I'd rather be stoned at the Middlesex Club than stoned in Caracas.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

COLSON: Great speech (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Huh?

COLSON: I was with you and ah Charlie Morgan my law partner and I was ah--

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: (unintelligible) the bastards.

PRESIDENT: So you told 'em that? What happened?

COLSON: Well I, I went through all this last night, and, and all the things that have happened in this country, the depression in the national spirit, the way you've lifted that; the ending of the war; the ending of the ar--, I mean the slowing of the arms race; the recognition of China, a different world we live in today, and--

PRESIDENT: That's right, that's the thing, that's the way to talk.

COLSON: I went through all of this in the press conference, I did it in the speech but I didn't want ah, I did it in the press conference and, and then I answered some questions on Watergate and of course what's on television last night, Watergate right. (laughs) That's what makes you so mad, you'd like to be able to get out and...

PRESIDENT: I know.

COLSON: ...hammer away at ah, at what ah--

PRESIDENT: I wonder if you would sit down, I told ah Bob Haldeman, Ehrlichman this today, that i thought could be good for everybody to do it. Just sort of write your precis as to what the hell, how you see this thing unfolding and how we should handle it, you know, it's a, ah, I'm sure you've thought about it because you see with everybody going off in his own direction that's, that's not good but...

COLSON: No.

PRESIDENT: ...what you really got to come down to is to say "Now, what in hell do we do here." You see. Because, I ah (coughs) I, I think, I think that the worse thing is for us all to get so obsessed with it that we think it's the only story in town. That's what the press wants, that's what the, the Ervin wants, on the part of the Democrats.

COLSON: That's right.

PRESIDENT: So good God, it's a terrible mistake. Huh?

COLSON: It is--

PRESIDENT: What do you think at the moment?

COLSON: No, that's precisely what I think. My view is that it's ah, my view is that we should decide on what the plan ought to be. Everybody follow it and whatever it is, whatever the decision is...

PRESIDENT: Um Huh.

COLSON: ...that has to be made. I feel a decision has to be made. I think that, that ah, where this, where this Watergate is hurting us, Mr. President, is not with the man in the street, he just doesn't give a damn. I mean really, frankly doesn't see much wrong with ah--

PRESIDENT: Well, it's the elite.

COLSON: It's with the elite but it, but the worse place it is, is with the party people.

PRESIDENT: That's what I mean, by the elite, by, I mean the finance contributors and all those assholes.

COLSON: Precisely.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: That's right, that's right.

PRESIDENT: I sometimes think it doesn't matter anyway cause they're never very strong anyway.

COLSON: Well that's right except that it, except-

PRESIDENT: That's why the Armstrongs and, and the Goldwaters pop off.

COLSON: Well it's, they're not strong for us, but, but it's ah, it's a hell of a depressant when they're not with us. I mean it's ah, I agree with you that they're not worth a hell of a lot.

PRESIDENT: I know.

COLSON: (unintelligible) perfectly honest.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, right.

COLSON: But ah--

PRESIDENT: I know, I know but you've got to have 'em, I know.

COLSON: Yeah, they're bad to have against us.

PRESIDENT: That's the very thing that destroyed Adams, you know wasn't the...

COLSON: That's right.

PRESIDENT: ...it wasn't the, I mean, poor Adams didn't do a damn thing but Bridges, plus the party elite knocked his ass off.

COLSON: Well I go back, I have to go back I'm afraid, ah, Mr. President to the, to the point that I've, I've made to you back in January and that is, that if there was someone involved, and I don't, I've never known, ah--

PRESIDENT: Uh huh.

COLSON: Ah.

PRESIDENT: He ought to come forward.

COLSON: At this point he needs to, because...

APRIL 12, 1973, FROM 7:31 TO 7:48 P.M.

6

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: ...what's gonna happen is that apparently he's gonna be, he's gonna be found out and ah--

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: But in the process it's goin' to, it's goin' to tar things for you and it's going to ah. Frankly there'll be other things falling out that are perfectly innocent and harmless but ah...

PRESIDENT: Hum.

COLSON: ...viewed in the context now my God, they'll put him up before a firing squad.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: The thing you want to do is it seems to me--

PRESIDENT: Yeah. All of the l--, all of the perfectly legitimate but hard line...

COLSON: Right.

PRESIDENT: ...and campaign activities appear to be ah espionage or sabotage, well God damn it, they're not.

COLSON: But you see that'll, that'll be--

PRESIDENT: That's the point.

COLSON: Ah, that's--

PRESIDENT: But the point is somebody's got to step up but who the hells gonna do that (laughs).

COLSON: Well that was the case, that was the point that Dave Shapiro made a couple of months ago.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: Brilliant trial lawyer. He said, "Look, there's a time in every case when you ah simply have got to cut your losses." He said, "You, otherwise you're gonna get, in the end, the real problem will be the fall out from a lot of other things that you're not even anticipating right now."

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: And ah--

PRESIDENT: True.

COLSON: I'm afraid that's, that's where I would have to come out if--

PRESIDENT: But the finger at the present time, unfortunately goes to the campaign committee doesn't it?

COLSON: Yes sir, very much so.

PRESIDENT: You think that's accurate?

COLSON: There's just a hell of a lot of circumstantial evidence but it's building awfully fast and ah they're all jumping ship over there, you know. The lower levels are all talking to different reporters and--

PRESIDENT: Are they?

COLSON: Yes sir, and--

PRESIDENT: What are they saying?

COLSON: Oh, they're pointing fingers every place except at you know whoever's talking to the particular reporter isn't pointing at himself. But otherwise, he's pointing at everybody else. Ah, I've developed, since I left the White House, some kind of new and useful intell...

PRESIDENT: Contacts, right.

COLSON: That I didn't know existed in Washington. That's very interesting. I know everybody walks in and out of Jack Anderson's office right--

PRESIDENT: Good, that's good.

COLSON: This is from co-opting a few people like ah Shapiro and ah...

PRESIDENT: Uh huh.

COLSON: ...and one or two of his friends. They're now on our team and...

PRESIDENT: Good.

COLSON: ...Christ, we, we find out a lot that we didn't know before. (Laugh)

PRESIDENT: Right, well--

COLSON: But, ah, my only, my only, I'm gonna, ah John called me tonight and told me he wanted a precis and I--

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: I've got you three of them, ah that I'm gonna come over and see John with tomorrow, they're...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: ...great.

PRESIDENT: If you wanna get Hill's and yours...

COLSON: Right.

PRESIDENT: ...apart from me because I must, I've really got to tend to the business of the country, you know...

COLSON: Oh no, you--

PRESIDENT: ...I just can't get--I'm trying to keep people from keeping me out of the God damned thing, you know, because I know nothing about it (laugh)

COLSON: No, that's right.

APRIL 12, 1973, FROM 7:31 TO 7:48 P.M.

9

PRESIDENT: ...part of the problem.

COLSON: No, that"s exactly right, I, I--

PRESIDENTN: So they all come trotting in and say, "Look, what'll do we do." And T said, "Well, God damn it, find out."

COLSON: Um hum. That's right.

PRESIDENT: Don't you agree?

COLSON: Yes sir. I think you should, you know, I'm, I'm the one fellow that can attest to that. I remember talking to you the week after. You were, you were horrified and this, and that's one thing that should not be

PRESIDENT: Well I...

COLSON: ...should not concern you anyway.

PRESIDENT: But, it isn't a question whether I was horrified, I didn't know about it but ah-

COLSON: No, I mean, but surprised, it's

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) it was unbelievable that ah that such stupidity could have been committed but ah, all of us felt that way.

COLSON: It was oh, it was (tape noise) good. I, I think you should keep out of this. I ah the biggest negative to the Watergate in my mind. Eventually it's gonna come out ah there's just too damn many people involved.

PRESIDENT: Oh sure, the whole God damn story's gonna come out.

COLSON: The whole story's gonna come out, and therefore I come to the conclusion that--

PRESIDENT: Get it out fast.

COLSON: Get it out and get it over with and cut off these hearings and stop this, this farce that's going on. And let's start reminding the American people of the extraordinary accomplishments

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: ...that you performed in this country. You know I had so many people come up to me last night after the dinner and say, "Thank God, it's great to put it all back in perspective," because they, and that's all that our--

PRESIDENT: They tend to get all tied up with this crap.

COLSON: Exactly and I felt it should be out and our people should be out, ah being dammed up, they, I, I think it's--

PRESIDENT: Because after all, sure we got some inflation but there's, this is, the God damn boom is unbelievable, you know, it's movin', this country's movin' right now.

COLSON: Oh, I had a meeting with all the bankers in Boston today, this was one of the reasons I stayed up and I never heard anything like it. They're, they're, of course they're concerned with inflation but ah--

PRESIDENT: Well of course, but ah, they...

COLSON: (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: ...they prefer a boom with inflation...

COLSON: (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: ...than inflation and depre--, depression.

COLSON: Yeah, they don't see any recession ahead at all, next year or the year after. They just think we're in one of the great uplifting cycles. They think you've increased productivity like ah has never happened before, that ah--

PRESIDENT: Um hum.

COLSON: Period of sustained expansion ahead, I think, the country's in, in great shape and ah that's what kills me about sitting around wringing our--

PRESIDENT: Grouching, that's right. Everybody is sort of in a bomb shelter at the present time and then--

COLSON: That's right.

PRESIDENT: You know, sort, Well I don't, I, I, you know what I mean. I kinda say, "Oh Good God, what are we going to do." Well, ah we musn't do that we just, it's like, it's like ITT, look we took three months worrying about it, didn't mean a God damn thing.

COLSON: No.

PRESIDENT: Watergate is worse because it involves some of our closest people.

COLSON: That's right.

PRESIDENT: But ah what the hell we do about 'em, I don't know.

COLSON: Well I, I think--

PRESIDENT: 'Course ITT involved Mitchell, Flanigan--

COLSON: Yep.

PRESIDENT: Who else?

COLSON: Oh, it was ah, Mitch...

PRESIDENT: Kleindienst?

COLSON: Ah, Kleindienst ah--

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

COLSON: Ah (unintelligible) Freeze (phonetic), a lot of other people.

PRESIDENT: Who?

COLSON: But, and they, and that was a hell of a sensation front page every day, it, it just, you know, it just doesn't affect the ah, how the average guy

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: ...is living his life. And that's ah, that's what's important, I mean that's what they-

PRESIDENT: Yeah. I think there's a tendency for everybody to get upset with Watergate as being, that this is the thing that's gonna destroy the Presidency, you know. This is sort of ah view of the Ray Price and that kind of group, you know what I mean (unintelligible). They say this is, this is gonna destroy the Presidency so ,what, they may be right.

COLSON: No it isn't going to Mr. President.

PRESIDENT: But if, but if they are right, the country's in a hell of a shape.

COLSON: That's right. Yeah but, yeah but they're not right.

PRESIDENT: When you stop to think of the fact that, that, that, that, that the Adams thing which involved personal venality, they didn't, nobody even remembers Adams today.

COLSON: No.

PRESIDENT: But this, which involves political crappin' around I don't know.

COLSON: You know, the damnable part about this is that it has a catchy name like Teapot Dome and so...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: ...everybody's sayin' it's Watergate and Teapot Dome. Now I, I asked a whole group of people

COLSON

(CONTINUED): earlier this week who can tell me the facts of the Teapot Dome case, nobody can. But they remember that name.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: They'll remember the God damn Watergate name. Adams ah--

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: You know, he's one fellow so that sort of...

PRESIDENT: Right.

COLSON: ...passed over. But the, I think the, the terribly important point is, Watergate is not going to destroy the Presidency because eventually the facts will come out. They have to. Once they come out, as long as someone takes action, then it's gonna be, then it's gonna be, and you can't keep them talking about the God damn thing.

PRESIDENT: If someone takes action, you mean against who?

COLSON: Well whoever, whoever-

PRESIDENT: Whoever did?

COLSON: Yep.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Well that's pretty tough.

COLSON: (Unintelligible) that's, you know, when that happens well then, then, that's the end of the, that's the end of the story. Then you have the complete defense to ah--

PRESIDENT: 'Course they're not just gonna stop there. They're gonna to go on to Segretti which is just crap as you know.

COLSON: But they can't

APRIL 12, 1973, FROM 7:31 TO 7:48 P.M.

14

PRESIDENT: ...but we ought to be defens- we ought to just take the attack on that and say, "For Christ sake what about burying down our headquarters and all that sort of thing."

COLSON: Oh, absolutely.

PRESIDENT: And, and apparently ah, and I've told also your gettin' them to get ah, in, in touch with you because Buchanan was working on this and he said we don't have anything.

COLSON: Oh hell, we had a lot of--

PRESIDENT: And I said, well God damn it, Colson's office is working on this for months, so they've got something.

COLSON: Well, I've sent them all, I've sent then all back into the files. I, I saw them all Wednesday and then ah--

PRESIDENT: Good.

COLSON: Yesterday and ah day before yesterday, I sent 'em all in the files.

PRESIDENT: You see it's terribly important that at the highest priority put not only right in the files but get it chapter and verse and put out a God damn white paper that'll scour them a little because they did, they did a hell of a lot of bad things that---

COLSON: Well and they--

PRESIDENT: --starting with the convention.

COLSON: Not only that, Mr. President, but, but ah Mc Govern today is ah using lists that were prepared, mailing lists that were prepared, with political fund. Ah leasing them out, people can buy them or rent them from him. That's the same thing that Tom Dodd did. It's taking political money and converting it to your personal profit. I gave that to-

PRESIDENT: Well I, who'd you give that to
(unintelligible) just any?

COLSON: I gave that to--

PRESIDENT: Some stupid ass, or somebody that can do
somethin' about it?

COLSON: I gave it to Adams today to research, he's a
bright young fellow.

PRESIDENT: Um hum.

COLSON: We'll get it out, Ah, it, if we can hang it
on him.

PRESIDENT: Get it out or put it out.

COLSON: That's the kind of stuff, but what the hell,
that's, I mean that's personal profit from
political...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: ...contributions.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: (Unintelligible) they hung that out.

PRESIDENT: He's selling his funds.

COLSON: That's right.

PRESIDENT: And his, his, that's right.

COLSON: Yeah, they're not his lists, they belong to
the...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: ...(unintelligible) who contributed.

PRESIDENT: Well, any event, ah do your study and ah
tell the people to get the hell off the ah
defensive. But I personally, you know, I'm
not

PRESIDENT

(CONTINUED): ah I'm not a bit ah depressed about the thing. I think that there's a tendency though for most of our people to get sort of in their, their, in their bomb shelters and sort of hunker down and say, "Oh Christ, everything's coming town-apart." Well, we've got a few things that we should be proud of, you know.

COLSON: Oh. Mr. President, you know I was thinking of that last night, it, Cambodia, I remember after Cambodia we were all cowering when we should have been out proud as hell.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

COLSON: The, it's this thing, the most important thing is, if I had any advice at all for you, the most important thing is not to let the damn thing divert you from, from the...

PRESIDENT: Doing other things, right.

COLSON: ...the magnificent things that are, I mean the difference in this country today and when you became President is, is everyone of us who has had any part of this have so much to be proud of and talk about it.

PRESIDENT: That's the point.

COLSON: Just not, God damn it.

PRESIDENT: Yeah and the whole damned White House staff and everybody else has gotta be proud rather than ah whining around and bitching about this thing.

COLSON: Well, that's right and, and this, this thing is going to, one way or another this thing--

PRESIDENT: It'll pass.

COLSON: It has to wring out and pass. And then, so it's--

PRESIDENT: Right.

APRIL 12, 1973, FROM 7:31 TO 7:48 P.M.

17

COLSON: So it's ah--

PRESIDENT: Would you believe that the (unintelligible) is how do you, how do you got ah brought to a conclusion.

COLSON: Well--

PRESIDENT: Nobody knows.

COLSON: I'll give you some ideas on that.

PRESIDENT: All right.

COLSON: Because I know how that can be done.

PRESIDENT: All right. And bring, and give me a paper on that will you?

COLSON: I'll have one for you, yeah.

PRESIDENT: Okay.

COLSON: Thank you, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT: All right.

COLSON: It's good to talk to you sir.